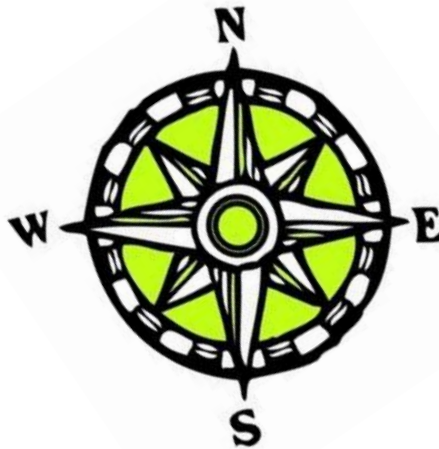




Semi-annual count of people sleeping outside in the HRM.

Data collected:
November 22, 2022

Program Lead and Author:
Eric Jonsson, [Downtown Halifax's Navigator Outreach Program](#)





Introduction

Starting at 7:30 a.m. on November 22, 2022, a group of 14 people (from 11 different homeless serving agencies) went out to speak with people who have been sleeping outside across the HRM. We had teams in Halifax, Dartmouth, Spryfield, Bedford, and Sackville. This is the fourth time we have done this, the previous three “counts” occurred in August of 2021, March of 2021, and August of 2020. Our goals with this survey were to not only highlight the number of people sleeping outside but to also connect with people not being served by the existing social services and any other issues they may be facing. This report shines a light on some of the things that the team found that day. This survey differs from the **point-in-time (PiT) count** that was conducted earlier this year (April 2022) because this survey is only counting people sleeping outside, and no other types of homelessness.

Acknowledgements

This survey took place on unceded Mi'kmaw territory. Indigenous people are overrepresented among the homeless population, as is documented by our survey. We are all Treaty people, and we need to do better in serving people of Indigenous ancestry. This survey was made possible because of the goodwill and cooperation of the people we talked to, those struggling personally with poverty and homelessness, and also community agencies like, [Welcome Housing and Support Services](#), the [North End](#) and [Downtown Dartmouth Street Navigator Program](#), [Out of the Cold Community Association](#), [Shelter NS](#), [Brunswick Street Mission](#), [Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland NS](#), [Adsum for Women and Children](#), and the [Halifax Regional Municipality](#). The survey was made possible through funding by the Halifax Regional Municipality and the [NS Department of Community Services](#).



Quick Figures

85 people surveyed, compared to 59 in April for the [PiT count](#), and 45 last August. (Outreach workers identified at least another 25 who were unable to be found on the survey date, so we estimate the total number to be more than **110**.)

19 people slept in Dartmouth regularly, **56** in Halifax, **1** in Eastern Passage, **7** in Sackville and **2** in Spryfield.

36% identified as Indigenous, compared to 3.8% of the overall HRM population (2021 Census.)

14% identified as black or African Nova Scotian.

6 were youth (24 and under) and **20** were older than 55. Average age was **42.7**.

26% identified as women, **3.5%** as non-binary and **70%** as male.

14% identified as LGBTQ2S, however **3 of the 6 youth** (50%) identified as 2SLGBTQ.

List of sleeping locations: **Tent (57), ATM (7), Tyvek huts (6), Car (5), Sleeping Bag (4), Park Bench (2), Blankets, Buildings, Hospital Heating Vent, Mall, Shed.**

Income Status: **43** on income assistance, **13** had no income, **11** panhandled.

23.9 months was the average length of time homeless. **26** had been homeless for less than 6 months.



Wish List

(copied verbatim from surveys)

jackets, tent, sleeping bag, too exhausted to think about it, jackets, sleeping bag, backpack, warm blankets, sleeping bags and pillows, sleeping bag, heat source, pallets, thermal clothing, shovels, cookware, insulation, tarps and hay bales, pallets, emergency blankets, kerosene, insulated tarps, first aid supplies, cold/flu medicine, blankets, pallets and hay bales, boots size 9.5, mittens, socks, tarp, sleeping bag, blanket, better heater, Styrofoam insulation, canned food, camo netting, butane, butane stove, light, propane, air mattress, propane, winter boots and jacket, propane, tarp, gloves, jacket, boots, propane or camping fuel, spare phone charger battery, gas cards, sleeping bag, tent, snow pants large, clothing large, winter pants size 36, propane tank, generator, warm sleeping bag, tent pegs, blankets, pillows, lights, tarps, camp stove, generator, lined tarp, mummy sleeping bag, butane, warm jacket size medium, stove, new tent, stove, new tent, heaters, blankets, generator, candles, propane, propane, snow pants medium to large, sleeping bag, ticket to Europe, sleeping bag, winter clothes size medium, blankets, stove, propane, tent, sleeping bag, shiny metallic thermal blankets, winter clothes, winter gear male large, pallets, butane stove, tarps, clothes, tent, tent, tarp, sleeping bag, heater, stove, sleeping bag, stove, butane size 10.5 boots, snow pants, propane, clothing, gift cards, money.

Editorial

Due to an increase in the number of outreach workers, and excellent cooperation from community partners, this was the most comprehensive survey completed that I have been a part of. We reached most urban and suburban areas of the municipality. This enabled us to get 85 surveys done, which is by far the most ever completed by folks living outside.

Sadly, as usual, **the percentage of Indigenous people living outside is grossly disproportionate compared to the overall population of Indigenous people. We need to be doing more to support this population across all service providers.** 36 % of people outside identified as Indigenous, compared to 22.8 % of overall homeless people in April's [PIT Count](#), and 29 % of rough sleepers last August.

It might be an anomaly, but 14 % of people identified as LGBTQ2S, compared to 20 % from last year's survey. *Are we doing a better job at supporting the LGBTQ2S folks in our system?*

Finally, a note about the bureaucratization of services and protective walls. Personally, I find I can work most efficiently by asking homeless people exactly what they need, and then I can quickly decide if that is something I can help them with or not. This means that I often don't hear people's stories because I take a very task-oriented approach and treat people as a problem to be solved rather than an entire complicated being. I call this the bureaucratization of my service because it reduces people to defined variables and outcomes. I have recently realized that I do this as a self protection mechanism, so I don't get too invested in the people I work with.

The surveys throw a wrench into this approach, however. When you start asking a bunch of questions about someone's life, they will inevitably start filling in the details around the yes or no questions. Every time I sit down with people and ask them to talk about themselves, I am reminded about how heavy this



work can be, and how each client's life is interesting and heartbreaking and rage inducing in their own way. This year, I was lucky in that I didn't shed a tear until after the survey's were completed and I was tallying them in the office the next day. One client, an older man living in his car, when asked if he had any plans for surviving the winter stated, '*that he had poor circulation in his legs, and couldn't keep warm.*' He then **declined the \$20 honorarium**, choosing instead to donate his time for our research. I wish there was something we could do for people like him, but right now all we can do is document people's experiences, and hope it forces change upon some of the people in power.

These people's stories are unique, but all too familiar. No one expects to become homeless, yet they so often find themselves without a place to stay through no fault of their own. It takes a tremendous toll on the people living that life, but also on the people working alongside them. So please take care of yourselves, and each other as we enter this long and cold season.

Methodology

The 22nd of November was a cold day with no precipitation. Cheque day was over three weeks previous, so many people were happy to receive the \$20 honorarium for completing the survey. 6 teams of 2 spread out across the city in the morning, and we had another team of 2 at the drop-in housing hub. Participants were mostly identified based on prior knowledge of their housing situation by the outreach workers, or just by talking to people as they wake up and leave their camps. Areas covered included Sackville, Bedford, Spryfield, Halifax peninsula, and Dartmouth.

The survey consisted of 15 questions, half of which were one-word answers, and the other half were more open ended. Therefore, the data we collected for the first eight questions is solid and clear, while the responses for the last seven are more sporadic and harder to tally. The survey is attached at the end of this document.

A clear gap in our counting of people sleeping outside is in the number of people who are relatively self-sufficient campers who don't interact with formal support programs. We have no idea how many people are living in secluded woods or parks, and we have no intention of trying to determine that number. People are entitled to some degree of privacy, so if they are intentionally living in a place away from the public's eye, we wish to respect that privacy by not going and trying to find people who might not want to be found.



Survey questions

Interviewer name _____ Time and Date _____

Hello, we are currently doing a survey of people sleeping outside in the HRM. We will give you \$20.00 and a cigarette if you answer these questions. Completed surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet by Eric Jonsson, Downtown Halifax's Outreach Navigator

Client Name: _____ Location of Survey: _____

Where do they sleep most nights: Dartmouth Halifax Spryfield Bedford Sackville Other _____

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What gender do you most identify with?
- 3) Are you Native or do you have Indigenous ancestry? Eg Mik'maw, Cree, Metis, Inuit etc
- 4) Are you black and/or a person of African descent?
- 5) Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S community?
- 6) What is your current sleeping situation? (Circle one) Tent, Sleeping Bag, Park bench, ATM or Stairwell, Abandoned buildings, Parking garage, Car, Tyvek hut, Church shelter
- 7) Have you been told to move along or go to a different sleeping location? Why, and by whom? (Compliance officers, HRPD, RCMP, Firefighters, random strangers)
- 8) What is/are your source(s) of income? Income Assistance/Welfare, CPP Old Age, CPP Disability, Bottling/Scrapping, Panhandling, Job, no income, other (specify if comfortable) _____
- 9) Are you on any housing waiting lists? Which one? (ie MRHA, shelter diversion hotel, non profits)
- 10) Is HRM your preferred location to live? If no, where else would you want to live?
- 11) What caused you to be homeless?
- 12) How long have you been homeless?
- 13) Have you stayed in any hotels funded by the province? How many different hotels? For how long?
- 14) What are your plans for surviving the winter? Do you have a need for any particular gear or equipment? A wish list? If so, what?
- 15) Do you have anything you'd like to add?

Signature upon receipt of \$20.00 _____

Notes for any follow up requested: